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The Adolescent Rebellion Against Panoptical Society: A Foucauldian Analysis of Adolescent  
Development in Contemporary Young Adult Novels

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of English  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree  
Master of Arts in English

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by  
C. Elizabeth Allen  
May 2007

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Keywords: Adolescent Literature, Michel Foucault, Panopticism

## ABSTRACT

### The Adolescent Rebellion Against Panoptical Society: A Foucauldian Analysis of Adolescent Development in Contemporary Young Adult Novels

by

C. Elizabeth Allen

Young adult literature has developed from a didactic means of behavioral control over adolescents to a means of promoting the reader's psychological development as an independent individual. In contemporary works (1970s onward), the use of Foucault's theory of the Panoptical society has given way to the development of the role of the adolescent rebel. In these novels, a pattern can be seen in which the protagonist defies the control of the Panoptical society and accepts the role of adolescent rebel. In particular, this pattern can be seen in the works of Francine Prose (*After*), Jerry Spinelli (*Wringer* and *Stargirl*), Bette Greene (*The Drowning of Stephan Jones*), and Gary Schmidt (*Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Daughter*). Each of these novels shows the adolescent rebel character defying the social ideals centered on age, gender roles, sexuality, and race. This pattern is important to the genre of young adult literature because it not only brings new literary merit to the idea of the "problem novel," but it also aids in the adolescent reader's psychological growth and development, as noted by Lawrence Kohlberg and Erik Erikson.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PATTERNS OF THE PANOPTICAL SOCIETY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Contemporary young adult literature is a relatively recent genre in literary history. Although young adult literature has been prevalent since the eighteenth century, popular works specifically for young adults have only developed since the twentieth century. The literary merit of works since the 1970s, as well as its relevance to young adult psychological development, is beginning to be investigated in academia. Through this development, a theoretical lens may be applied to further understand and recognize the literary qualities of contemporary young adult literature.

Around the 1740s in England, John Newberry began to publish works now known as the genre of young adult literature, which began as a means of didactic lessons in which children were instructed on how to live (Nodelman 83). These lessons mainly came from the societal perceptions of authority figures found in the school, family, and church. Gender roles were quickly established through these texts; children learned how to be effective young men and women based on society's expectations, as Perry Nodelman writes that one "main purpose of Newberry's children's books and many of those being produced today is to foster that sort of guilt—to make Tommy want to be a good boy and Polly a good girl" (84). Through such readings, children learned their roles quickly by comparing their lives to the lives of the protagonists. Readers who did not meet society's norm sensed a subtle feeling of exclusion from both the protagonist and the actual society.

The subtle exile of outcasts through young adult literature continued during eighteenth-century America. As the literature developed during Puritan society, the literature written for

children was based on “the conviction that children were as prone to sin and in need of salvation as adults were. [Publishers] produced books specifically aimed at directing young children to the right path” (Nodelman 83). Such a means of control over the actions and behaviors of young adults was subtle and effective, as the ultimate purpose was to instill the adolescent readers with the understanding that they were in danger of falling into sin.

Although young adult literature of the past was a means of didactic lesson, the later half of the twentieth century saw an obvious shift in the genre. The development of adolescent psychology changed the purpose of young adult literature, which has now become “a literature full of misfits, iconoclasts, freaks, geeks, and more than a few non-conformists” (Jones 13). In the 1960s and 1970s, psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg began to stress the importance of the adolescent’s psychological development, and literary critics used his theory as a starting point for giving scholarly merit to young adult literature. Kohlberg lists three different levels of psychological and moral development that young adults acquire at different points in their lives: the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional levels. These different levels of development make up the child’s moral indoctrination from pre- to post-adolescence. In the pre-conventional level, “the child is self-centered and basically unable to consider the interest and claims of others,” and the reasoning behind doing right is motivated by fear of punishment (Bushman 14). The conventional adolescents focus more on their relationship to the group, and “motivation for doing right is based more on caring for others, the Golden Rule, and the desire for others to see the individual as a good person” (Bushman 15). Finally, the postconventional individual acknowledges that moral principles might not reflect society’s expectations, and thus it is more important to uphold these moral values than it is to be rewarded by authority or be

accepted by the group (Bushman 15). Overall, the young adult slowly becomes less of a dependent individual and more of an independent person as she moves through each of these three phases. The adolescent, in essence, understands that being an “outsider” is not always worthy of the corresponding feelings of guilt and exclusion.

Critic Peter Scharf goes on to further develop this theory and apply it to literature, stating that

At each stage of development, particular literary issues are especially salient. While, clearly, great literature has an impact upon almost any age or developmental level...it may still be argued that the moral focus of particular literary works may be especially psychologically significant at specific stages of development. (19)

In Scharf’s theory, young adults can achieve a vicarious experience through literature that helps them move through Kohlberg’s stages and achieve moral understanding. Not every young adult will be able to have the same personal experiences necessary for moral development, and so literature is an effective means of experiencing reality vicariously. The idea of merging a higher literary spectrum (typically found in the canon of literature) with new concepts in adolescent psychological development is most likely the basis for much young adult literature since the 1970s, and also is the reason that works in which children are instructed to simply “be good” are becoming fewer and fewer.

This possibility, however, means that young adult literature still works in the idea of the didactic, just on the opposite end of the spectrum. Now instead of instructing children to behave and follow rules, much of the literature focuses on the importance of individuality over

conformity, encouraging adolescents to become independent individuals. In contemporary young adult literature, “books may offer young adults what our society does not,” states John H. Bushman, further claiming that “this literature serves young people in their struggle with identity, with their relationships with adults, and with their choices, which often suggest their concern with moral questions of right or wrong” (28). Novels with such a focus give the adolescent reader a vicarious experience which allows him to move from the preconventional to the conventional and finally to the postconventional level, at which point he will be more solid in his morals. In novels for young adults, this maturation is most often seen in the development of the protagonist as a type of “adolescent rebel” rather than a static character whose ultimate goal is to follow society’s expectations.

Obviously, such a transition from conformity to individuality is recent and can be paralleled with the development of the postmodern movement in literature. As young adult literature has acquired traits of the postmodern movement, the role of the Panoptical society is prevalent in contemporary works for young adults. The function of what Foucault defines as the Panoptical society has become juxtaposed with the developing role of the Adolescent Rebel, and it is the Rebel’s separation from this society that allows her to mature from the conventional level to the postconventional level. Most often, the Rebel is breaking away from society’s standards in a realistic (though somewhat exaggerated) setting, emphasized by the constant observation of their society.

Before I explain the pattern found in such contemporary works of young adult literature, I will first describe the background of Panopticism. Michel Foucault defines the Panoptical society as follows: in any society, it is possible for authority to maintain control and power by



simply presenting the idea that individuals are constantly under observation (Foucault 197). What is necessary is that these individuals do not recognize when they are and are not being monitored—therefore, they will constantly behave according to the societal norm, as if they were *always* being watched.

Foucault developed the concept of the Panopticon from the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who originated the idea as a type of architectural design for a prison. As a building, the Panopticon was designed as a means of psychological imprisonment, as the idea was to construct “a prison in which an inspector would be able to see at a glance everything that was taking place...the inspector being concealed from the observation of the prisoners” (Atkinson 84). Therefore, Bentham hypothesized, if prisoners were never certain when they were being observed, they would act as though they were always being watched. Thus, the means of confinement could be limited—the need for locks, chains, and other means of imprisonment were unnecessary, and the prisoner would theoretically never try to escape or rebel against authority. Foucault described this behavior as “self-policing,” as “he who is subject to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202-203). The prisoners of either Bentham’s actual prison or Foucault’s society would be aware of what behaviors were expected of them, and they would follow this norm in order to avoid further punishment. Bentham never identifies exactly what this further punishment would entail, but he explains that the psychological threat would be enough to keep the prisoner from acting against authority. “Visibility is a trap,” argues Foucault (200), “disciplinary power...is exercised

through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility....it is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (187). Therefore, the unstated punishment is not as great as the psychological turmoil that comes from one believing (yet never being certain) that he is constantly being watched.

Due to financial constraints, the prison was never built and thus Bentham’s theory was never tested or proven (Atkinson 86). However, Foucault believed that Bentham’s theory could be applied to society, which he perceived to function as a type of Panopticon. Foucault also believed that, in order to keep the group from questioning the role of authority, those in control would create a type of “crisis” in order to maintain control of the population, and to convince them that the authority’s standards were worth following (199). As the head of the authority could not possibly observe all members at any given time, Foucault explained that authority would appear to give false power to those being observed. Not only would the members self-police, but they would monitor (or simply appear to monitor) the behaviors of others. Of course, the members themselves had no real power, but the perception of such a possibility allowed the ruler to administer control through a fake system. Along with workshops, hospitals, and military organizations, Foucault describes this type of psychological manipulation as being effective in schools, thus suggesting that schoolchildren, when believing that a valid form of authority might be observing them, will alter their behavior to fit their society’s norm.

But if a group (especially a group of schoolchildren) is given a set of rules, one person will eventually defy them. As contemporary young adult novels are focused on creating a sense of individuality amongst its readers, the acknowledgment and defiance of the Panoptical society

is prevalent. This action occurs through a similar pattern, all of which culminates in the creation of the role of the adolescent rebel figure in young adult literature.

The pattern of the adolescent rebel's development in a Panoptical society can be seen in many works for young adult audiences. It is the adolescent rebel's defiance of the Panopticon that allows the protagonist (and hopefully the reader) to be one step closer to reaching Kohlberg's postconventional level of moral judgment. However, the rebel (who first begins by conforming to society) is unable to make the transition on alone; the introduction of other individuals is necessary. Through these inclusions of characters and their interaction with the adolescent rebel, a pattern develops. This pattern includes three different roles in the Panoptical society, which I call the adolescent rebel, the unconscious dissenter, and the personified Panopticon. Each character's role is defined as follows.

The protagonist of the postmodern maturation-style young adult novel lives in a Panoptical society in which he constantly self-polices his actions. The protagonist is aware of this self-policing (either consciously or subconsciously) and internally resent the standards set by the Panoptical society. This is the character who will eventually fill the role of the adolescent rebel. The adolescent rebel is presented as a "typical" adolescent, which suggests universality to the reader. The point, here, is to have the reader identify with a character who, like many adolescents, follows the rules but longs to break away and establish her own identity separate from a constantly-observing society.

The rebel acknowledges the existence of the Panopticon, mainly through his direct interaction with it. Typically, the rebel will also experience a moment of fear of what she could become (a loss of identity), should she continue to self-police and conform. This realization

occurs through the rebel's interaction with minor characters. As the reader compares himself to the universality of the rebel, the rebel compares herself to the universality of the minor characters, who, though having the potential to break away from society's norm, allow their behaviors and actions to be altered by the observation of the Panopticon. Unlike the rebel, these minor characters are consumed by their fear of the Panoptical society.

Although the rebel appears to want to follow the crowd and avoid any recognition from the society, the introduction of the unconscious dissenter changes his perception. The unconscious dissenter is a character who openly breaks away from the rules of the Panoptical society. Postmodern maturation novels for young adults typically focus on four major areas where the unconscious dissenter disturbs the reality of her society in some area: age, gender, sexuality, and race. Obviously, such areas are not controllable, which is why her dissention is "unconscious." It would not be accurate to describe this character as a rebel, because her actions are unconscious and not a choice: she defies society simply by being who she is. This is not the same as a rebellion, in which a choice has been made.

Although the unconscious dissenter lacks power to change and meet the norm, society appears to accommodate such individuals. The issue arises in the fact that the unconscious dissenter is unapologetic for who he is. The rules set by society are understood by the individuals, and the unconscious dissenter has an opportunity to self-police his behavior like the rest of the society and fix himself. In most cases, he does not even attempt to conform—and if he does, he will typically revert to his original rebellious (but unconsciously-so) behaviors.

The society which the unconscious dissenter defies is either her actual society (consisting of both adolescents and adults) or simply the adolescent society itself. At this point, we can see

the construction of the personified Panopticon. The personified Panopticon represents the expectations of society—both the expectations of adolescents to their peers and the expectations of adults (even if they are absent) to the adolescents. The power here lies within the unseen and typically unidentified force that controls the Panoptical society. If the society is composed entirely of adolescents, then it is also a microcosm for the society outside of their own world, for where else would they obtain such perspectives?

Although it is unidentified, the personified Panopticon is manifested in one or two minor characters—characters whom the rebel is typically close to. Whether or not these characters are actually in power, they are still a representation of the personified Panopticon. As Foucault describes, those in power in the Panopticon are able to extend their observation and power to those of less power, which creates self-policing:

[The Panopticon] was a complex function since it linked the absolute power of the monarch to the lowest levels of power disseminated in society; since, between these different, enclosed institutions of discipline (workshops, armies, schools), it extended an intermediary network, acting where they could not intervene, disciplining the non-disciplinary spaces, but it filled in the gaps, linked them together, guaranteed with its armed force an interstitial discipline and a meta-discipline. (215)

The power of the personified Panopticon is always prevalent through this system of extended observation, even if this role is represented in characters who are themselves under the observation of the Panopticon.

Foucault's theory seems to mirror that of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of the debtor and creditor. In a situation where one person holds power (specifically monetarily) over another, Nietzsche states that

In "punishing" the debtor, the creditor participates in a *right of the masters*: at last, he, too, may experience for once the exalted sensation of being allowed to despise and mistreat someone as "beneath him"—or at least, if the actual power and administration of punishment has already passed to the "authorities," to *see* him despised and mistreated. The compensation, then, consists in a warrant for and title to cruelty. (65)

Here again is the relationship of power to this connection between the personified Panopticon and its subjects. Those in control of the Panoptical society are able to constantly observe the community by giving a perception of power to each individual. In this way, the community is unaware that they do not have actual power, and the power that is present is distributed from the authority figure.

The rebel, however, maintains a conscious awareness of the personified Panopticon. He acknowledges the manifestations of the authority and self-polices his behavior to keep from being singled-out. The unconscious dissenter, meanwhile, usually acknowledges the presence of the personified Panopticon (typically in the same manifestations of particular characters), but he usually does not conform to divert the attention of the society. This refusal to conform brings him into focus, which begins the conflict.

Caught between the unconscious dissenter and the personified Panopticon, the adolescent rebel must make a choice. The rebel is torn between the utopian world of the unconscious

dissenter and the dystopian Panoptical society (ruled by the authority). The rebel could actually totally embrace either society: although she follows the rules of the Panoptical society, she resents having to do so and wishes she could actually be herself. The true identity of the rebel usually reflects the identity, in some way, of the unconscious dissenter. The moment of climax occurs when the rebel actually assumes her role and publicly defies the personified Panopticon and the Panoptical society. Although this role might only be temporary, the rebel resists the Panoptical society and faces retribution for her actions. The unconscious dissenter does not consciously mean to break the rules of her society—her rebellion, if it can even be identified as such, is something they cannot change. The rebel, however, makes a choice to defy the personified Panopticon, and for this, she faces great consequences.

Such consequences often cause the rebel to rethink his position. At times, he will give up his role as rebel and return to the general population of the Panopticon; in other instances, he continues his new role against society's orders. The rebel also faces one moment in which he faces a large group of watchful, sometimes unidentifiable eyes—this situation is always symbolic of the rebel's acknowledgement of the Panopticon and the moment he accepts that his behavior is being observed. In most cases, this is when the rebel suddenly realizes that he has nothing to fear—breaking the rules of a Panoptical society (and thus facing the eyes which for so long were seemingly invisible but always watching) is not as frightening to the adolescent rebel as the idea of constantly self-policing his behavior.

With these three roles established, their importance in the novel's pattern becomes clear. The story is told through the eyes of the protagonist, who will eventually fill the role of adolescent rebel in this scenario. This is an important characteristic, because telling the story

through this character's eyes shows the division between the society and the individual—in particular, the individual who follows the rules set by the Panoptical society, and yet internally feels resistance to these same rules. This is the only character who is both consciously aware of and against the Panopticon, and thus telling the story through her point of view allows the reader to see the division between the worlds of the unconscious dissenter and the personified Panopticon.

The unconscious dissenter, incidentally, will often represent the flipside of the Panopticon (and at this point, I must depart from Foucault with the theory of the positive Panopticon). If one type of Panopticon—one type of constant monitoring—can be negative, then it is possible that another type of Panopticon can exist. The unconscious dissenter represents a positive Panopticon. She will notice that which matters in the members of her society: the good, the useful, and the positive qualities that each member of their society possesses. In this way, as Foucault predicts, the observer is actually being observed (204). Again, this represents the utopia found within the world of the unconscious dissenter. It allows for the understanding that, when individuals are grouped together, a Panoptical society may inevitably be formed, but that it does not have to be negative. Also in this instance, Foucault's theory of the observer being observed comes into play: the unconscious dissenter typically observes the personified Panopticon without the power figure being aware of it. However, this is not a malicious observation—although the unconscious dissenter has the power and the capacity to assume the role of a personified Panopticon, her personality and perception of a utopian society keeps her from doing so. Instead, her awareness is typically a means of survival.



This pattern is prevalent in many modern works of young adult literature, working within a new form of a maturation novel. The reason for direct acknowledgement of the Panopticon through such a pattern allows the young adult readers to become aware of her own societies in which monitoring and self-policing may occur. By becoming aware of these situations in literature, young adults are able to apply the experiences to their own lives and thus make an easier transition into adulthood. Therefore, I believe that such works are necessary in adolescent development. In the following chapters, I will attempt to prove this theory through the analysis of five contemporary young adult novels. I will focus on the four qualities that are so often used as the basis of conformity (age, gender, sexuality, and race), and show how this pattern has helped develop the role of the adolescent rebel in contemporary young adult literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### AUTHORITY AS A PERSONIFIED PANOPTICON IN FRANCINE PROSE'S *AFTER*

*“What’s the point of going to school if it’s going to be like prison?”* (Prose 71)

Francine Prose’s novel *After* focuses on issues of school violence, which, in relation to the Panoptical society, creates an Orwellian adolescent society. This is the one novel referenced in this thesis in which the rebel defies adult authority directly; in the other works referenced, the rebel confronts his own adolescent society and thereby indirectly defies an adult authority.

“Childhood does not know racial, national or religious intolerance,” writes Cornelia Meigs, “but it does not take long for children, who are born mimics, to reflect the attitudes and prejudices around them” (550); therefore, as adolescent society is a microcosm for adult society, rebelling against one’s peers is also a rebellion against one’s elders. In this novel, however, the split is directly between the adolescents and the adults. Because of this, the “fault” of the adolescent rebel and the unconscious dissenter is the most notable difference between them and the adult authority: their age.

*After* takes place at Central High School in Western Massachusetts. The story is told through the perspective of sophomore Tom Bishop as the plot begins “minutes after the shooting” (Prose 1) at Pleasant Valley, a nearby high school. The story follows the effects felt by Central High students “after” the shooting occurs. Fearing the same situation will happen at Central High, the administration hires a grief counselor to assist with the school’s safety. The counselor, Dr. Willner, slowly begins a totalitarian reign over the student body, using fear to control not only the students but also the teachers and parents. Willner makes the parents and teachers suspicious of the students simply because the students, like the shooters at Pleasant

Valley (or even at Columbine in Colorado and Paducah in Kentucky—real school shootings that Prose references) are teenagers. Willner exercises his power by eliminating any student who defies his authority, and he eventually convinces the students to monitor one another's behavior. Known as both "rebels" and "smart jocks" (Prose 5), Tom and his friends are greatly affected by this, and it is only a matter of time before two of Tom's friends, Silas and Avery, are removed from the school and sent away to "survival programs" at the suggestion of Dr. Willner.

In a diversion from the pattern's norm, the unconscious dissenter in *After* is a minor character having only a single page of action, Stephanie Tyron. While Central High first conforms to the will of Dr. Willner, Stephanie immediately defies his authority. Taken out of the context of the "new rules" established by Dr. Willner, Stephanie's action is not a direct dissention; rather, she simply goes about her day as she normally would. When the school administration bans the color red (because gang members in other, larger cities supposedly wear the color, and also because the killers in a nearby school shooting used the color to send signals to one another), Stephanie continues to wear a red ribbon in memory of her older brother who dies from AIDS. This is no alteration for Stephanie, as she has "worn a red ribbon every day since her older brother died of AIDS" (Prose 39), so she unconsciously defies the new rules by simply acting as she always had. Without her brother's death, Stephanie might not feel any need to defy Dr. Willner because the color would have no personal significance. Stephanie, the brief unconscious dissenter, "...had something really tragic happen in her life [which] made her braver than anyone else. So she was the first who stood up to Dr. Willner—and the first one who got sent away" (Prose 247). Perhaps it is the fact that Stephanie becomes absent from the society

that begins the conflict between adolescent rebel and personified Panopticon. Thus, an absent unconscious dissenter could be more effective than one who is present in society.

It is Stephanie's rebellion (which is arguably not a rebellion at all) that encourages the other students to recognize the invasion of the Panopticon in their lives. They become the followers of the unconscious dissenter, even though her time in the novel is short. Initially, there are no direct rebellions from the students. Most acts of defiance are anonymous or accidental, but the actions still resonate with questions concerning Stephanie's disappearance and ultimate death. The other "lost" students, Silas and Avery, become other versions of the unconscious (and, once again, absent) dissenters to Tom and his friends. The remaining group is unable to defeat the personified Panopticon, but they are able to separate themselves by leaving town in search of "a place where we could live and be happy. Somewhere that hadn't been ruined yet. Somewhere there was peace. Somewhere where no one had ever heard about Pleasant Valley, or what happened after" (Prose 330).

*After* mirrors Foucault's theory of the Panopticon in an educational setting, as

The school tends to constitute minute social observations that penetrate even to the adults and exercise regular supervision over them: the bad behavior of the child, or his absence, is a legitimate pretext...for one to go and question the neighbours, especially if there is any reason to believe that the family will not tell the truth. (Foucault 211)

Thus, the awareness of the Panopticon stretches not only to the adolescents but to their parents as well. Once the adolescents begin to monitor their behavior, the parents will take similar actions. The Panoptical observation, then, is focused on both the children and their parents. The power is

held by one individual (Dr. Willner), but it is established that he is probably only a front-man for a larger organization. As Foucault predicts, the power figure has used a disaster (in this case, a school shooting) to implement fear in the community, thus making them easier to brainwash and control. Willner is very much a representation of Foucault's authority, who understands "in order to see perfect disciplines functioning, rulers dreamt of the state of plague [disaster]" (Foucault 199). In order for Willner to gain complete control over Central High (and, vicariously, the community of teachers and parents), he must constantly remind everyone of the dangerous behavior possible in adolescents.

With the crisis situation and Willner's authority comes the loss of power in other individuals. Teachers and parents who once held power over the students are at Willner's mercy, yet he allows them to believe that they do, in fact, still have control. Willner encourages parents to monitor their children's behavior at home and teachers to observe behavior in their individual classes. Because of a false perception, those once in "control" are used by Willner to monitor the behavior of the students, and thus suspicion of the teenagers is instilled in the adults and the Panopticon is extended. Similarly, Willner eventually enlists the support of the students themselves in policing—Tom and his friends are aware that there are "spies" who are responsible for the termination of certain faculty and students, and this creates self-policing behavior, as the students are never certain when they are being watched, or even by whom. When students and teachers begin to disappear, Tom notes that "someone—one of *us*—had told Dr. Willner....The spy had to be a student who, as Dr. Willner said, was 'ahead of the curve.' Or else they had bugs and hidden cameras everywhere, and someone had been watching" (Prose 150).

In another incident that leads to Tom and his friends self-policing their behavior is their discovery of the hidden cameras on the school bus—Tom and his friends use the bus ride as an opportunity to discuss the recent developments in the school’s policies until they realize that their conversations have been recorded and used against them. This realization adds to the overall awareness of the Panoptical society. Tom, in fact, realizes the Panopticon goes far beyond high school, when he notices that his father acts in certain ways in public because he believes other people are watching. Tom ironically notes that his father acts “like an insecure teenager” as he “assumed that people were watching, judging...when in fact no one was paying the slightest attention at all” (Prose 124). Tom understands, then, the effects of the Panopticon on behavior (the cause of self-policing), and implies that teenagers (and even adults) are aware of observation at all times.

Willner himself makes reference to himself as a personified Panopticon by the use of the word “we.” In a threatening conversation with Silas, Tom’s friend, Willner says ““What I want you to understand, young man, is that we *will* be watching. And that if you *are* using drugs or any illegal substances at all, we will know and we will find you, and you will be disciplined to the fullest extent of the law” (Prose 119), and thus the Panoptical society (or at least the perception of such) is directly identified. In the beginning, Willner refers to himself and the Central High student body as “we,” which implies a positive sense of inclusion and community. Eventually, the term is used as a threat—Willner does not refer to himself separately from Central High as “I” or “me,” but still as “we.” This insinuates that he is not acting alone—that the school does, in fact, have spies, or that he is possibly just a part of a more powerful organization. Such spies or other members are never presented in the novel, suggesting the idea

that Willner may or may not have been bluffing. But this is not the point—whether or not students or teachers worked for Willner, the point of the language is the fear it instills in the listener. The reader can see Tom and his friends altered by this single word, and the ambiguity of whether or not Willer acted alone is unimportant—the perception is what matters. Tom himself embraces this mentality as (after another friend, Becca, is spared punishment for breaking a rule) he observes

I figured that the reason they let her go was sort of like the reason they were trying to make us throw the game—to show us that they could do what they wanted, when they wanted, how they wanted. They didn't have to follow the rules. They *made* the rules. They didn't have to be consistent. (Prose 198).

Tom's justification of the arbitrary rules shows the split between the students and the personified Panopticon (that is, Willner). Even more, he has accepted the possibility that Willner is a part of something more powerful, and that, although he is the only authority figure present, he does not act alone.

Tom's observations about the sinister changes in his school ultimately lead to his role as the adolescent rebel. Tom begins by believing that he is a rebel but denotes that it is simply a teenage façade: "Also we were known as rebels. Sort of. Because there wasn't much to rebel *against*, we never got into actual trouble" (Prose 5). Even though Tom acknowledges that "one tiny hint of rebellion, and we could find ourselves in an even more terrible place," (Prose 204), he actually claims the role of adolescent rebel after the death of Stephanie Tyron. Tom begins to talk back to the guards at first—challenging them as far as he can. He questions his teachers and encourages his father not to read the emails or pay attention to the school's new policies. In

these small ways, Tom is slowly taking his role. Tom is finally presented with the opportunity for direct defiance of the personified Panopticon at the basketball game against Pleasant Valley—he is told to lose the game, and at the very end, he chooses to win, though his narration only subtly admits to this (otherwise, it appears to be pure chance). It is at this point that Tom has claimed his role.

Alongside Tom, Becca Sawyer begins to directly question her teachers. In an in-class essay, Becca writes “about how she was seriously spooked because...Central High was turning into a police state” (Prose 113). Instead of grading the essay, the teacher suggests that Becca destroy the paper so that no one ever reads what she has said. Becca encourages Tom to question the policies, and she finally outright questions Willner. Foucault’s philosophy of the observer eventually being observed becomes reality when Becca paints “WHERE IS SILAS?” “WHERE IS AVERY?” and “WHERE IS STEPHANIE?” (Prose 296) on the walls of the school. Willner is unaware who is asking these questions, so they represent the general consensus of the student body. This is his first outright questioning—Willner is now in the spotlight. This is as far as the role of adolescent rebel in a Panoptical society will allow the two, however—once they are caught by Willner, Tom and Becca must escape.

Here, Prose creates an Orwellian setting to alert adolescent readers to the very real threat of losing all identity in the name of safety in a post-Columbine school environment. Simply because the characters are teenagers, they are automatically mistrusted by authority, and those who do not conform in an apologetic manner are eliminated. In this work, the Rebels are successful: Tom and Becca (the only two students to stand up to the authority) escape in the end, while the unconscious dissenters (Stephanie, Silas, and Avery) are lost. It is, in fact, the loss of



Stephanie that causes Tom and Becca to indirectly and then directly act out against the personified Panopticon. This is the only book referenced in which the personified Panopticon is formed almost completely by an adult authority. Elsewhere, the rebel and dissenter act against their own society, which is a division of Foucault's philosophy. In this novel, however, Foucault's theory of the Panopticon in a school-setting is relevant: the adolescents are separated from the adults, and though they have their own community, their power is only a microcosm for the actual power of Dr. Willner. Therefore, instead of indirectly defying adult society by acting out against one's peers, the rebel and dissenter openly defy adult authority (the personified Panopticon).

## CHAPTER 3

### GENDER ROLE DEFIANCE IN JERRY SPINELLI'S *WRINGER* AND *STARGIRL*

*"Mostly what I noticed were the eyes."* (Spinelli, *Wringer* 96).

The Personified Panopticon depicted in Jerry Spinelli's novels *Wringer* and *Stargirl* represents a society that upholds the traditional gender roles for male and female adolescents. The traditional roles are set by the ideals of the community; they establish not only what it means to be a boy or a girl but also what it means to be an adolescent in that particular society. "Literature confirms the idea that boys are wild things again and again," writes Perry Nodelman (166), which is a standard, acceptable perception. Boys in past works of young adult literature who do not meet this standard (or even girls who do) are viewed as outsiders, deviating from the typical way of life. A promotion of conformity to society's standards was viewed as a major function of young adult novels, as Cornelia Meigs writes of young adult literature of the early twentieth century:

In books for the older boys and girls is the very practical [problem] of earning a living and choosing a career....But the glamour spread about the profession, the sure and sometimes spectacular rise to success of the heroine—for most of these books were written about girls—after the necessary number of disappointments, removed them from the realm of realism and put them in a class by themselves....Under the guise of realism, they were building up false hopes. (556)

The importance of literature, then, was separating what was defined as "feminine" and "masculine" so that the reader knew society's expectations.

In more contemporary works for adolescents, this structure has been broken and more alternative personalities are represented. However, the works are still realistic and represent the difficulties a non-traditional male or female character faces in a Panoptical society. Although the rebels and unconscious dissenters typically break away from the society of their peers, the school environment still functions as a microcosm for the actual adult world in which they live. While adults are typically absent in Spinelli's novels, the adolescent rebels indirectly defy adult authority by defying the society of their peers.

In *Wringer*, ten-year-old Palmer LaRue is destined to become a pigeon wringer (a boy who breaks the necks of wounded pigeons shot for sport) at his town's annual Family Fun Festival. The novel both begins and ends with a newspaper clipping describing Pigeon Day of that year's Family Fun Festival. This anonymous type of prologue and epilogue denotes the Panopticon—although the names of the participants (specifically Palmer) are excluded, the reader is aware of the situation at hand.

In Palmer's community, the role of wringer is traditional for a ten-year-old boy, and Palmer embraces the tradition as best he can. Palmer's hidden truth is that "he did not want to be a wringer. This was one of the first things he had learned about himself" (Spinelli 3). With his father holding the pigeon sharpshooter award from 1989 and his best friend Beans obsessed by wringers since the age of five, Palmer's anti-wringing beliefs are deemed untraditional by comparison. Palmer, however, is very aware of this division between himself and the rest of society, in particular the males, whom he often perceives as a group of abstract, indistinguishable eyes. He is careful to hide his true feelings, even going so far as to exclaim that "I hate pigeons!

I hate 'em all!' He looked up at the staring, glaring eyes. He clenched his fists, he screamed: 'I'm gonna be the best wringer there ever was!'" (Spinelli 135)

A tame pigeon, later dubbed "Nipper" by Palmer, is introduced as the unconscious dissenter to Palmer's Panoptical environment. With this new friendship, Palmer suddenly becomes more aware of the constant observation by his peers and fears his relationship with Nipper being found out, particularly by Palmer's friends Beans, Mutto, and Henry (who represents the personified Panopticon). Palmer's gang breaks into his room at various times, increasing Palmer's own paranoia. To Palmer, Henry represents the biggest threat because he (like Palmer) is gentle and kind when not around the other boys. Palmer "saw in Henry something of himself, and worse, what he could become" (Spinelli 176), and openly confronts this issue when he tells Henry "'Quit!...I saw you pulling your little sister in the wagon!'" (Spinelli 198). Henry is unable to break away from the observation of the personified Panopticon and be himself, and Palmer recognizes that he, too, is threatened by the same loss of identity.

A female character who breaks away from society's perception of what it is to be feminine is Dorothy Gruzik. Dorothy withstands abuse at the hands of Palmer and his gang and represents another unconscious dissenter. Because she is a girl and will not cry, Dorothy is breaking the idea of what a girl should be like to the boys, in particular Palmer's group of friends: "[Beans] wanted something from Dorothy. He wanted her to scream or laugh or cry or kick or sling a book bag. Or even scowl. A good scowl, that would do for starters. Anything but ignore them" (Spinelli 109). Even though Palmer torments Dorothy just like his friends, he eventually becomes her friend in secret. Palmer is aware of the implications of their friendship,

as well as what his Panoptical society would think. Dorothy, too, is aware, as “whenever she saw Palmer...at school, she acted as if she did not know him. Palmer sensed that she was doing this for his sake” (Spinelli 124). It is the friendship between Dorothy and Palmer that allows Palmer to be at ease with his fear of becoming a wringer, and Dorothy is the first person he tells when he adopts Nipper as his pet. Dorothy eventually advises Palmer to rescue Nipper, who is captured with the other pigeons and held to be shot on Pigeon Day; the problem with her suggestion is that Palmer realizes his rescue will make public his issues about wringing.

Although Palmer feels comfortable being open with Dorothy, he believes that she cannot understand what it is like to be a ten-year-old boy in a town that idolizes hunting and wringers. Finally Palmer must separate himself from the personified Panopticon in a public manner, as he rescues Nipper from being shot on Pigeon Day of Family Fun Festival. At this point, a young boy follows Palmer and states to his father that he too wants a pigeon, and thus the novel ends with a direct contrast to the younger version of Beans following the older wringers onto the field and wishing for his turn to kill the birds. Thus, Palmer’s rebellious act (finally made public) has had an effect on others:

Standing there in feathers up to his sneaker knots, Palmer felt a peace, a lightness that he had never known before, as if restraining straps had snapped, setting him free to float upward...Through a pigeon’s eye he looked down from the sky upon the field, the thousands of upturned faces, and saw nothing to fear. (Spinelli 228)

Here, Palmer turns his own observation back onto the personified Panopticon and thus embraces his role as the adolescent rebel.

Until this point in the novel, Palmer has regarded his Panoptical society as “ten thousand orange eyes” (Spinelli 63) that are always watching him, but he now has a new perception. Here, Palmer has completely separated himself from the personified Panopticon and its society. More than that, however, he has become Foucault’s second observer to his own society, as in the Panopticon “it will even be possible to observe the director himself” (Foucault 204). This gives a sense of freedom and power to members of such a society, so long as they are able to understand and recognize it. Although Palmer’s society watches him defy his role as a ten-year-old boy, he now defiantly stares back, unafraid.

Spinelli focalizes *Stargirl* through the male perspective of sixteen-year-old Leo Borlock, but the traditional high school conformity is broken by his female companion (the unconscious dissenter) who calls herself Stargirl Caraway. Stargirl brings conflict to Mica Area High School (itself functioning as the personified Panopticon) with her unconventional mannerisms and dress. After some time, the high school embraces Stargirl’s individuality, but only until Stargirl questions the competitive attitude of her peers during a crucial basketball game. At this point, she is again ostracized from the group, as is Leo.

Although Stargirl is presented as feminine, she is hardly a typical high school female. Stargirl embraces feminine qualities that society views as positive—compassion, empathy, nurturing, and companionship—and yet she does not embrace typical (and negative) teenage female characteristics. Unlike other teenage girls in the novel, Stargirl appears happy being alone and easily expresses her feelings to others. Hurtful gestures and words from the student body do not appear to faze her, and she lacks understanding of competition and rivalry. Instead, Stargirl makes an effort to give positive feedback to everyone she knows, simply by watching

them and commending them when they succeed, or consoling them when they fail. Stargirl has rejected the typical role as a teenage female and focused on a more enlightened relationship not only with her peers, but also with herself. Although her lack of such a typical teenaged perception is positive, it still sets her apart from her society and places her under the Panopticon's observation.

While Leo loves Stargirl and openly accepts her eccentric mannerisms (thereby rejecting the Panoptical society and embracing his role as Spinelli's rebel), he later attempts to reform Stargirl into a normal teenaged girl so that they can both regain the group's acceptance. Leo is bothered by the isolation he feels from his school, as "for the rest of the day, and the next and the next, I grew increasingly paranoid....I was intensely aware that the nature of our aloneness had changed. It was no longer a cozy, tunnel-of-love sweetness, but a chilling isolation" (Spinelli 99). Leo's concession to the majority shows that the role of the rebel can change—just as any literary character can be both a hero and a villain, characters in young adult literature can be a rebel and concede to the personified Panopticon later on.

Ultimately, the change fails, and Stargirl returns to her former ways. Archie Brubaker, an eccentric neighbor and former professor, advises Leo to choose between what is important (his beautiful relationship with Stargirl) and what seems important (his concern for Stargirl's conformity to high school life). Siding with the majority—the personified Panopticon of Mica Area High School—Leo is left alone when Stargirl disappears one night after the school's dance. When she leaves the dance, "Stargirl seemed to float down the promenade in her buttercup gown. She climbed into the sidecar, the flowered bicycle rolled off into the night, and that was the last any of us ever saw of her again" (Spinelli 175). Although it is understood that Stargirl's

family moves away, Spinelli invokes a sense of mystical realism concerning Stargirl's disappearance, which makes her another absent unconscious dissenter (though this absence, unlike Stephanie Tyron's, does not occur until the end of the novel).

After she leaves, the student body reverts to its existence before Stargirl's arrival, but certain students have changed completely over the course of the school year. Leo himself has matured, but only because of his loss. His rejection of the high school Panopticon is replaced by what appears to be another, more positive Panopticon inspired by Stargirl: "I know that I am being watched. The echo of her laughter is the second sunrise I awaken to each day, and at night I feel it is more than stars looking down on me" (Spinelli 186).

Overall, this novel focuses on a split in the Panoptical society. The high school student body, as always, focuses as one type of Panopticon. It observes each student, and thus the students instinctively know when they are behaving out of place. Foucault notes this in his essay, explaining that in groups of individuals, those in power would create a type of "abnormal individual" role given to those who did not meet their society's expectations. A means of control in a Panoptical environment, then, was to "individualize the excluded, but use procedures of individualization to mark the exclusion" (Foucault 199). Leo denotes his subconscious awareness of this exclusion when he explains the "rules" of high school to Stargirl, whose experience is limited due to homeschooling:

This group thing, I said, it's very strong. It's probably an instinct. You find it everywhere, from little groups like families to big ones like a town or school, to really big ones like a whole country....The point is, in a group everybody acts pretty much the same, that's kind of how the group holds itself together.



Everybody? she said. Well, mostly, I said. That's what jails and hospitals are for, to keep it that way. You think I should be in jail? she said. I think you should try to be more like the rest of us, I said. (Spinelli 137)

Leo's explanation of typical adolescent life and perception is almost a direct description of Foucault's description of the Panopticon, which says that "whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used" (205), which leads to groups becoming "like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (200). Finally, Foucault asks, "is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (228). Thus, the cyclical mentality of the Panopticon extends to any institution in which behaviors must be monitored and controlled, and as both Foucault and Stargirl observe, they all reflect the prison.

However, Stargirl is not completely unaware of the idea of the Panopticon and the personified Panopticon. In fact, she herself is a personified Panopticon figure: she is observant of the world and people around her, and she finds out as much information about people as she can. What information she does not know, she assumes based on constant observation. She anonymously performs kind deeds for others, which first confuses and then excites the student body. When Stargirl singles out a student for congratulations, "you feel foolish, exposed," Leo notes, "It's the most painful thing that's ever happened to you. Your brain keeps squirting out a single thought: *I'm going to die....* Why don't you just die? Because they're clapping for you...and whoever heard of dying while they're clapping for you? And they're smiling at you" (Spinelli 49-50). Through Stargirl's actions, the student body embraces their Panoptical society,

but in a more positive light. Now, they act together, as “for years the strangers among us had passed sullenly in the hallways; now we looked, we nodded, we smiled. If someone got an A, others celebrated, too. If someone sprained an ankle, others felt the pain” (Spinelli 40). Much as Palmer looked back into the eyes of his society, Leo notes that his group, too, “discovered the color of each others eyes” (Spinelli 40).

Although Stargirl disappears, her reputation lives on in the lives of her classmates—Leo in particular. Leo is left with a sense that she is always with him and always watching. In contrast to the typical feelings of paranoia and wariness that the Panoptical society causes him, Leo is left with a sense of peace. The novels of Jerry Spinelli show that, through defying traditional gender roles, not only can the rebel break out of the Panopticon and make his own observations, but the Panopticon can also be inverted and used for healthy, positive, unifying means—if only we let it.

## CHAPTER 4

### SEXUALITY IN BETTE GREENE'S *THE DROWNING OF STEPHAN JONES*

*“For once in your life, couldn't you do what everybody else does? Just go along with the crowd?”* (Greene 101)

Along with breaking out of traditional gender roles, defying society's standard for

sexuality is another means where a character can attract the focus of the Panopticon.

Homosexuality in literature, especially in literature for young adults, has become a recognized topic. Since young adult literature of the past taught children how to be effective members of society, it also taught them how to be effective members of their own gender; not only how to behave as young men or women, but also how to relate to the opposite sex. Similarly, recent adolescent psychology reflects the apprehensions young adults have in relations to members of both sexes.

Such concerns reflect Erik Erikson's theory of the development of a personal identity in adolescence. His first two developmental tasks for adolescents deal with gender roles: first, developing successful relations with members of both sexes; and second, acquiring a proper role for one's respective gender (Bushman 9-10). By completing these tasks through experience, the adolescent is closer to becoming an independent individual. Obviously literature can play a major role in these transitions, but the definition of a “proper gender role” creates an issue in contemporary literature because the tradition gender role has become less fixed, as represented through the creation of characters such as Stargirl and Palmer LaRue. As homosexuality is a recognized issue in young adult society, literature attempts to alter the task for those for whom “tradition” is not an option. However, the most effective means to do this requires

acknowledging the realistic backlash homosexuals face in their society, which involves the Panopticon. The homosexual literary character, then, is an unconscious dissenter, and the role of the adolescent rebel shows the split in society concerning the trials of homosexuality.

This method of the rebel pattern is seen in Bette Greene's novel *The Drowning of Stephan Jones*. Greene's protagonist, sixteen-year-old Carla Wayland, faces the Panopticon every day of her life as her political and non-traditional mother brings their family into focus in the small town of Ratchetville, Arkansas. The focalization through Carla shows that Ratchetville closely resembles high school life, where the outer self (clothes) represents the inner self (personality). Again, the adolescent society is a microcosm for the larger community, where the acknowledgement of the Panopticon occurs through Carla's inner monologue:

And if that same stranger got the impression that there's not a dress code in Ratchetville, well then he's sure enough to be wrong again. 'Cause the rule, the never-to-be-broken rule, was and always would be: Clothes have to be rough and tough to show the world the wearer was and always would be rough and tough (Greene 6).

Carla's observations parallel how the town's words and actions reflect its own inner prejudices against any form of change, or against anyone who breaks outside of what they deem acceptable behavior.

Carla is no stranger to her society's ideas about acceptable behavior, as her liberal and outspoken single mother Judith breaks these rules daily. Reeling from constantly being observed by society, Carla seeks the adolescent perception of normalcy, and finds it in religious Andy Harris, his nuclear family, and his friends. These group of individuals represent the same

personified Panopticon that Carla fears, as Mr. Harris (Andy's father) berates Judith for protesting the placement of the ten commandments in the city hall, saying

“Behavior like that might be just the ticket with some of those free-loading, nuts-and-berries free spirits in Parson Springs, but that kind of stuff doesn't go in this town!....Think *our* Constitution needs help from *your* mother? Well, I don't! I fought for our country, risked my life over in Korea—so I ought to know!”  
(Greene 16-17).

This situation establishes Carla early on as a protagonist in crisis. Although she is embarrassed by Judith's radical thoughts, Carla is also protective of her, as she responds to Mr. Harris that “in her own way, I believe Mother has fought for this country, too. She's fought for the right of everybody to choose their own beliefs even if they're different from your beliefs or mine” (Greene 17). Although Carla's response seems defensive, she in fact has separated herself from her mother at the end of the dialogue when she indicates that Judith's beliefs are different not only from Mr. Harris's, but from Carla's as well. While Carla will not allow Mr. Harris to criticize her mother, she will subtly identify with him and his disbelief at Judith's actions.

Carla's wavering loyalty is further identified when she states that “she needed to belong to a handsome and respectable family. And she needed it now!” (Greene 23). Such a conflict sets Carla up as a protagonist—a potential adolescent rebel—torn between two societies: the exclusive world of Ratchetville, and the inclusive community of Judith Wayland. Although Carla wants to defend her mother's idealism, Carla is still a teenager and she seeks invisibility and normalcy, which she believes she will find in her relationship with Andy Harris.

Andy appears to be Carla's means of escape into normal society, but his "All-American" façade crumbles when he begins to harass a local gay couple, and Carla soon realizes that one of those men, Frank, is her friend. Frank Montgomery, and his partner Stephan Jones, become the unconscious dissenter to Carla's rebel, who at first defends them. Realizing that this display only ostracizes her more from the personified Panopticon (Andy and his family and friends), Carla concedes and looks the other way during Andy's pranks, much to the chagrin of her mother. Again, Carla's loyalty is tested, and Judith represents something of a personified Panopticon herself, though her presence is not as powerful to Carla as the rest of the Ratchetville society. Carla chooses to stay away from the focus of the Panopticon, as she notes that "it was kind of funny, but now for the very first time, the whole group was truly united, sharing something as strong and as powerful as hate" (Greene 85).

For Foucault, the group's unity reflects the functioning of a crowd before the creation of the Panopticon, as "the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separate individualities" (201). The function of the Panopticon, then, is to break down the individualities and compress them back into a group with a common goal or purpose. Thus, anyone deviating from the purpose of the group will alter their behavior through self-policing to fit the perceived norm for fear of being excluded. "The inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers," Foucault notes as a means of effective group control (201). Carla's relation to the personified Panopticon reflects these theories, as she monitors her behavior and represses her desire to stop Andy and his friends from tormenting Frank and Stephan.

Finally, Andy and his friends resort to physical abuse and the eventual manslaughter of Stephan, who drowns after being thrown into a river. Although Carla is unable to stop Andy, she leaves the group to seek help. Once Andy and his friends, now identified as the “Rachetville Five,” are put on trial, Carla is forced to testify against them in the courtroom. While Carla’s loyalty has wavered throughout the novel, she actively becomes the adolescent rebel at this point. Carla tells the truth about Andy’s “pranks” leading up to Stephan’s death even though she faces alienation from the Rachetville society and the community of the Rachetville Five. But this is no longer a concern to Carla, who, in response to what Stephan did to antagonize Andy, says ““What I have been trying to explain is that this doesn’t have anything to do with anything that Stephan Jones did, but this has everything to do with what Stephan *was!*”” (Greene 174). Carla’s courtroom testimony identifies Stephan and Frank as unconscious dissenters—the abuse they endured was the result of who they were, and the reason was because who they were did not fit society’s version of normal.

Although Carla has separated herself from Rachetville, Carla’s relationship with Frank is renewed and solidified, as “at that moment...she felt without question or quibble that Frank Montgomery was her friend” (Greene 211). Similarly, Carla’s loyalty to her mother is firmly established, as Judith reminds her daughter that ““What is important to remember is why you decided to testify in spite of everything. Right from the start you realized that some people would consider you a traitor. But in spite of everything you decided to forge ahead”” (Greene 189). By claiming her role as the adolescent rebel, Carla has established her own community separate from the Panoptical society of Rachetville.

Carla is not the only character who changes, however. Left without Stephan, Frank Montgomery transitions from the role of the unconscious dissenter into the role of the rebel. He turns the attention of the personified Panopticon onto Andy, allowing him to experience being under the Panoptical society's glare of suspicion. Frank does this by turning Andy's testament against him, and insinuating that Andy and Stephan were in the midst of a relationship. As Mr. Harris continually teases his son about his sexuality, this public announcement places Andy under unwanted observation from his family and friends:

Frank turned smartly on his heel and began to walk away, but not before Andy began racing after him, arms outstretched, pleading "Boy, you'd better come back here and tell the truth, you hear? 'Cause what you're doing isn't fair!" ...But the only response Andy heard was the chorus of *whiz-click, whiz-click, whiz-click* from the small army of Nikons and the soft hum of the video cameras. (Greene 217)

Here, Greene's novel shows how the rebel and dissenter can invert the Panopticon in order to achieve their only sense of success in an otherwise bleak situation. They can, as Foucault predicts, obtain a sense of power by recognizing that the fate of the authority is "bound up" in the Panoptical society in which he exists (Foucault 204). This type of revenge differs from Spinelli's breakaway from the Panopticon. For Palmer and Stargirl, the simple acknowledgement and positive use of the Panopticon allows them to escape its confinement. For Frank as the sudden rebel figure, however, it is not that simple. Because homosexuality is still a taboo subject in literature, Greene keeps the situation realistic. It is easier for a heterosexual boy or girl to consciously break outside of their socially-acceptable gender roles than it is for a



homosexual boy or girl to simply be who they are. The method of dissenting from the Panopticon, then, must be more direct and more aggressive in order for the unconscious dissenter to have any sense of freedom or relief.

## CHAPTER 5

### RACIAL RELATIONS IN GARY SCHMIDT'S *LIZZIE BRIGHT AND THE BUCKMINSTER BOY*

*"I am not my own, [Turner] thought, but belong body and soul to every parishioner in Phippsburg who might have a word to say about me to my father"* (Schmidt 42).

With organized religion functioning as a means of keeping children in control, it is no surprise that the disciplinary mechanism in a Panoptical society can be represented through a church congregation. Foucault himself believes that religion can act as a Panopticon, stating

The Christian School must not simply train docile children; it must also make it possible to supervise the parents, to gain information as to their way of life, their resources, their piety and morals....Religious groups and charity organizations had long played this role of 'disciplining' the population. (Foucault 211-212)

Therefore, both children and their parents are under the scrutiny of a religious Panopticon. The actions of the children will directly reflect the actions of the adult, and thus the entire religious (in this case, Christian) family finds itself under constant observation.

For Turner Buckminster, a minister's son in Gary Schmidt's *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, such a Panoptical society is a more prevalent force than God himself. Living in Phippsburg, Maine in the early twentieth century, Turner is always aware that his father's congregation is watching him. Because the congregation makes up the majority of the town itself, Turner's entire society observes every move he makes and reports any mishaps to his father. The congregation, then, is a microcosm for society and creates the role of the personified Panopticon, which is directly represented in three adult characters: Sheriff Elwell, Deacon Hurd,

and Mr. Stonecrop. These characters control the town's perceptions, the actions of the Buckminster family, and even the future of the town itself. Through this control, certain rules are established for the Buckminsters, including Turner, who must follow in the steps of his religious father.

The Buckminsters, for the most part, accept their roles and follow the social order. Turner's father, Reverend Buckminster, directly instills the rules into Turner time and again, and is the direct voice that expresses disgust and anger every time Turner accidentally breaks one of the rules. Although Turner's mother objects to the constant observation of her family (which is brought up again and again by her husband), she only gives Turner indirect comfort and does not encourage him to break away from the rules that bind him.

Turner's only relief comes in the form of a foil character—a black Islander known as Lizzie Bright Griffin. Lizzie is also the descendant of a minister, the Reverend Griffin of Malaga Island off the coast of Phippsburg. Lizzie's relation to the Panopticon is different—she is the unconscious dissenter, and while her ultimate offense is being black, it is her and the other Islanders' refusal to leave their homeland that brings her into the focus of the personified Panopticon. The town wants to create a “better” community to increase tourism, and this includes removing the residents of Malaga Island. Reverend Buckminster's assistance in the matter is suggested, as the personified Panopticon figures inform him that the town is “on the brink of economic collapse” (Schmidt 66) and that income from tourism will save it. However, it eventually becomes a threat, as Sheriff Elwell tells Reverend Buckminster, ““We are the town. Everyone around here seems to understand that except for you” (Schmidt 183). Turner's father, having a role of importance in the town, is encouraged to help the personified Panopticon figures

remove the Islanders, and fearing the loss of the town's support if he declines, Reverend Buckminster promises to help.

Turner accepts his role as the adolescent rebel once he defies the town and, at the time, his father's wishes, and invites Lizzie to live in Phippsburg. Turner's only support comes from two minor characters, Mrs. Cobb and Mrs. Hurd. Both of these women are elderly, with the former on her deathbed and the latter arguably insane. Still, these two women perceive a clearer reality than the rest of the community. Upon first meeting Turner, Mrs. Hurd lays her hand on his cheek and asks "So, Turner Buckminster III...when you look through the number at the end of your name, does it seem like you're looking through prison bars?" (Schmidt 15). Still later Mrs. Cobb says of Turner's friendship with Lizzie "It doesn't matter a damn—yes, even old ladies cuss—it doesn't matter a damn what anyone else in the town of Phippsburg has to say about it. It doesn't matter what anyone else in the whole state of Maine has to say about it" (Schmidt 132). When Mrs. Cobb dies, she leaves her house to Turner. Although the rest of the congregation believes that the house should be donated to the church, Turner accepts his role as adolescent rebel and offers it to Lizzie. Once he explains his decision to Reverend Buckminster and the others, Turner "[expected] the disappointment his father must feel. But his father's eyes were upon him, and they were not disappointed" (Schmidt 170). Once Turner has finally accepted his role, his father can also let go of the façade he has held in the eyes of the personified Panopticon.

Although Turner's actions are noble, they result in the accidental death of his father and the institutionalization (and ultimate death) of Lizzie. Turner and his mother, hounded by the community, are pressed to leave the area, but they remain in Mrs. Cobb's house. The separation

from the personified Panopticon, then, occurs only mentally and not physically—Turner no longer cares what the congregation thinks of him, and he is allowed to openly embrace his interests (specifically the studies of Charles Darwin, which members of the congregation frown upon). Although he is separated from both Lizzie and his father, Turner is no longer under the control of the Panopticon.

With the issue of racial relations, many critics may perceive this work to automatically fall under the category of a “problem novel” that focuses more on ideology and less on literary quality. Certainly the issues pertaining to race are not a recent development, and it even precedes the timeframe for contemporary young adult novels. Writes Cornelia Meigs of literature of the 1950s,

There have been many books written with self-conscious effort to point up the charms of a child of a minority group or to call forth pity for his lot as a member of a group against which there is discrimination. Perhaps they fill a need in our present period of growth but they are propaganda not literature. (551)

While racial relations make up a primary focus of the novel’s plot, the development of Turner as a protagonist (and as an adolescent rebel) is of obvious importance. Turner already did not fit in with his community; the very first page reads “Turner Buckminster had lived in Phippsburg, Maine, for almost six whole hours. He didn’t know how much longer he could stand it” (Schmidt 1), and still later on “he figured if he couldn’t light out for the Territories and had to stay in Phippsburg, he’d need to find a place to breathe—someplace where no one else would come around, someplace where no one was likely to come around” (Schmidt 41).

Although Turner seeks isolation from a constantly-observing community, his relief comes in his friendship with Lizzie. Lizzie, as an outsider, is able to help Turner fit in with his new community. A Boston Native, Turner does not understand the foreign rules of rural-Maine baseball, and it is Lizzie who enlightens him. She also introduces him to other aspects of the town's culture, mainly dealing with nature. Lizzie, as an unconscious dissenter, is another representation of Foucault's second observer. Because she is aware of the Panopticon, she is able to observe those who are in power. With her knowledge, Lizzie teaches Turner everything he needs to know in order to live in this society, and because Turner is white, he stands a chance for survival. Not only does he survive, but Turner learns to appreciate the positive aspects of the community. When his break with the personified Panopticon occurs, then, Turner only mentally separates himself from the society rather than relocating altogether, as he originally wanted to do.

Indeed, Turner has actually made friends with former enemies at this point, thanks to Lizzie's explanation of the rules of the town. Turner himself is even able to help his father come to grips with the revelation that the goals of the town do not reflect the goals of a decent Christian family. Turner and the Reverend Buckminster both learn to stand up against the Panopticon, even though the Panopticon is found within a tight-knit religious congregation, where Turner's father is the leader. Lizzie works as a type of catalyst for Turner, who, at the end of the novel, not only better understands his community but also himself and even his father.

Although Turner has finally stood up to the personified Panopticon, the novel does not end with a happy reunion of Lizzie and Turner or justice for the authority figures. The Islanders are relocated, and many (including Lizzie) perish in the process. But Turner is finally free from

the constraints of the congregation. He knows that he “will always be a minister’s son. [He will] be a minister’s son until [he] take[s] his last breath in God’s sweet world” (Schmidt 198), but now Turner understands a greater truth about humanity: a truth that he continually saw in the eyes of Lizzie, his father, and the whales on the coast of Malaga Island:

The world turns and the world spins, the tide runs in and the tide runs out, and there is nothing in the world more beautiful and more wonderful in all its evolved forms than two souls who look at each other straight on. And there is nothing more woeful and soul-saddening than when they are parted. (Schmidt 216).

Facing a pair of eyes other than those of the Panopticon, Turner gains insight into himself and his relationship with others. As Mrs. Cobb told Turner earlier, what the community or congregation thinks of Turner’s friendships does not matter. Turner’s enlightenment solidifies his rebellion and instills a sense of hope in a situation that otherwise seems hopeless.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE LITERARY MERIT OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE:

#### *Problem Novels*

As I have described, the development of the adolescent rebel figure in a Panoptical society is often found in novels dealing with “hot topic” issues. The issues I have represented reflect problems concerning age, gender roles, sexuality, and race. Typically, young adult novels focusing on these issues reflect the category of the “problem novel,” in which the focus is more on instilling an ideology into the reader than telling a story effectively and creating literary quality. Problem novels are loosely defined as “a story about divorce, VD, abuse, alcoholism, or whatever” (Koertge 132) used to help adolescents cope with such situations. Criticism about problem novels has been prevalent since the birth of the category itself. Many critics feel that there is no worth to a problem novel, and that it only spouts dogmatic ideology to the reader, rather than giving them a means to determine truths on their own.

Critics may argue that novels like *After*, *Wrinker*, *Stargirl*, *The Drowning of Stephan Jones*, and *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* fall into this category and, thus, have little purpose outside of promoting a type of political dogma in the mindset of an already impressionable reader. However, this is far from the case concerning many contemporary works of young adult literature. These works, in particular the novels depicted, fill both a psychological need and a literary need for their adolescent readers; in short, they are anything but dogmatic propaganda.

The importance of the theme of adolescent rebellion against a Panoptical society (specifically through one character—the adolescent rebel) reinforces psychologists Lawrence



Kohlberg's and Erik Erikson's theories of adolescent development. Both Kohlberg and Erikson developed theories pertaining to the psychological and moral development of an adolescent from around age eleven to age eighteen, and both stressed the importance of becoming an individual separate from parents and peers. For Kohlberg, this development is centered around determining from where one's values and morals arise. In early childhood, the child places more emphasis on positive reinforcement from others, but towards the end of adolescence, she needs to look back on her personal experiences in order to determine her beliefs. Thus, the importance moves from the adolescent's focus on the group to her own self-awareness, and "the key concept here is in the 'necessary but not sufficient' relationship between intellectual development and moral development" (Bushman 15). Likewise, Erikson indicates that achieving a sense of personal identity is the most prevalent task in adolescence (Bushman 8), and in order to obtain this identity, the adolescent must complete a series of tasks establishing herself as both a part of and separate from her society. Through these two theories of adolescent development, the role of the adolescent rebel provides the reader with a vicarious experience in a realistic, familiar setting of a Panoptical society. Through watching the protagonist obtain his own sense of identity in a community that focuses on conformity through self-policing, the adolescent reader is able to better understand why she must separate herself from her own community in order to establish a personal identity.

This separation brings about difficulties for the protagonist, which is a main focus in the novel. Therefore, it is easy for critics to define these works as a type of problem novel; however, the novels actually contain much more literary depth. As problem novels focus only on telling a story—on focusing on the problem—there is a lack of character development. In contemporary

young adult novels that depict issues regarding the rebel, the unconscious dissenter, and the Panoptical society, the focus is not on the problem itself but rather on the development of the individual. Rather than avoiding hot-topic issues for young adults, authors such as Prose, Spinelli, Green, and Schmidt embrace these topics and present them in a believable manner. The one dogmatic, didactic lesson in each of the novels is simply the importance of individual thinking over mob mentality, and this is what the adolescent rebel achieves once he steps away from the Panoptical society. However, it can hardly be argued that such a lesson promotes the mentality of the typical problem novel—if the readers are encouraged to think for themselves, this includes disagreeing with the protagonist’s (or even the author’s) beliefs and actions.

Along with this realistic depiction of individuality, the contemporary young adult novels make the situation more realistic with the inclusion of the adolescent rebel character and his separation from the Panoptical society. The improvement of the young adult literature genre through this pattern can be seen in four different ways:

#### *Character Development*

The pattern makes the novel more believable, thereby allowing the readers to connect more fully with the characters. Typically, the rebel figure is not a rebel in the beginning of the novel. He conforms to the will of society, though it is noted that he does not agree with what he is doing. Often, such rules go against his inherent personality, but the fear of the Panopticon keeps him from acting out. Even after achieving the status of the adolescent rebel, he may lose this role and return to the life presented in the beginning. Although the rebel (or, in some cases, the “non-rebel”) has reverted to his previous actions and behaviors, he is typically changed for the better. Much like Leo Borlock who gives in to the pressure of Mica Area High,

the non-rebel is at least more aware of his surroundings and situations. Leo knows he is always being watched by Stargirl, and even though they are apart and he is back to being part of the crowd, he is at peace.

Similarly, other characters can assume the role of the rebel, if even for a brief moment. As Frank Montgomery turns the attention of the Panopticon onto the personified Panopticon figure Andy Harris, he briefly becomes the rebel figure, moving away from his role of unconscious dissenter. He is now no longer separate from the Panoptical community; rather, he has directly stood up against its rules and the personified Panopticon itself. Thus, the role allows for fluidity of the characters—they are not confined to one set role as the pattern develops through the novel.

#### *Empathetic Connection*

The rebel becomes personally involved in the situation (thus accepting the role of adolescent rebel) through the introduction of the unconscious dissenter. For most teenagers, the inclusion of an “underdog” character invokes empathy and gives a call to action. It is understandable, then, that an adolescent character in a novel would feel compelled to act out against a society in which such an individual was persecuted for something he unapologetically could not control or change.

#### *Realistic Reactions*

Although the rebel consciously defies the Panoptical society to support the unconscious dissenter, she still feels the pain of the isolation and scrutiny from the community. Often, there is no “happy ending” in these novels, yet the situation is not presented as depressingly bleak

either. This is a form of realism in young adult novels—a technique that is becoming more prominent in young adult literature as a whole.

### *Literary Development*

The creation of the adolescent rebel moves adolescent readers towards a higher schema within literature. Although the novels presented in this thesis are not representations of Matthew Arnold's definition of "Touchstone texts" per se, they still include a higher literary merit than other works written for adolescents. Such merit is primarily in the role of the protagonist, who, as stated, is in a fluid role as the adolescent rebel. Because of this fluidity, the rebel reflects the role of the protagonist found in classical texts—he is dynamic, realistic, and at times even fulfills the role of the hero-villain or anti-hero. This is a step away from many other works in adolescent literature (and in the category of problem novels), in which the characters remain more static. The role of the protagonist in contemporary young adult literature can be somewhat unclear, which creates a better frame of reference for the adolescents before they begin reading more canonical works in the classroom. Not only will readers relate to Leo, Palmer, Carla, Turner and Tom as they attempt to do what they think is right, but the readers will begin to associate this unclear, changing identity to other works that they will read in their literature classes. Young adult literature as a preparation for more canonical works is a major development in literature, and it also aids in the adolescent's ability to comprehend canonical texts.

Overall, these texts make the adolescents more aware of the world around them, including their own society and the literary world in which they are undoubtedly involved through their English classes. The message from each of these books (and from countless others produced at the same time) is to be an individual and think for yourself. The situation presented

in each novel is sometimes bleak, but this is simply the inclusion of realism in the world of young adult literature. Whether or not the rebel has managed to physically separate himself from the Panopticon is not a concern in realism; rather, this falls into the issue of what Jill Paton Walsh describes as “a related demand calls for books that will directly confront the problems of states of childhood and adolescence; books about where the reader is emotionally rather than geographically” (37).

Walsh goes on to exemplify the issue of the stigma of problem books in contemporary young adult literature:

So I would say that a literary treatment of some problem is not good because it may directly apply to some children, but good if it can engage the interests of a very large number of children, most of whom will not find themselves in the exact dilemmas described. A problem book is good enough for the child with the problem only if it is good enough for everybody else (41).

The development of the adolescent rebel pattern has helped bridge this gap between the stigmatized problem novels and non-ideological works for young adults: though the adolescent reader is presumably not going through exactly the same situation, she can relate to feeling out of place in the Panoptical society. This connection helps the reader understand the situation of both the adolescent rebel and the unconscious dissenter, and possibly even the personified Panopticon figure as well.

### *Conclusion*

Although Bentham’s prison was never constructed, Foucault notes that

The practice of placing individuals under ‘observation’ is a natural extension of a

justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures. Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labor, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons? (227-228)

Such thought, when placed in context with young adult society, is terrifying because places such as schools are ideally meant to be places of intellectual freedom. However, literature can allow the readers to create their own positive Panopticon separate from Foucault's definition. Readers watch unseen as a character develops and matures as an adolescent rebel and, with the help of the unconscious dissenter, breaks free from the rules of the personified Panopticon. Foucault states that the Panopticon "had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert" (214). To reach one step closer to maturity, the adolescent must stare into those same eyes, just as the adolescent rebels of these five novels stared into the eyes of their Panoptical community, and know who it is that stares back.

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